

BR 7-9702

Personal

copy
Honorable William Benton
Encyclopedia Britannica
342 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Bill:

I have read with much interest your forthcoming Britannica article and the speeches you have delivered. This is an admirable job of reporting.

As to the issue between us, I do not think it is as sharp as you would imply.

We are in almost complete agreement as to the magnitude and general qualitative excellence of the Soviet educational program. And I am just as concerned as you are at the difficult challenge it poses to our society at home and abroad. Taking the really long term view, however, I remain convinced that there is reason for cautious optimism.

My cautious optimism is simply based on the profound belief expressed by St. John: "The truth shall make you free." (John VIII, 32). My reasoning is equally simple: a system of education cannot be as good in the fields of science as the Soviet's is and continue indefinitely to be totally fallacious in the areas of knowledge involving basic human values including history and economics. Students and teachers alike will press for genuine enlightenment across the board and will reject falsified history and contrived absurdities in the social sciences. Dramatic evidence to support this came only last week at the 20th Party Congress when speaker after speaker called for accurate realistic revision of the basic Soviet works on history and economics. To be sure, a lot of this was part of the attack on Stalin and centered on the Short History of the Communist Party, with its obvious distortions, but the implications were broader. Moreover, in economics many matters are susceptible to proof, one of them being the behavior of capitalist economies, which certainly continues to throw the Soviet theorists into confusion.

DOCUMENT NO. 29
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. X
DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C
NEXT REVIEW DATE:
AUTH: BR 702
DATE: 2003/1 REVIEWER: 8

When I referred to the Soviets' massive educational drive as an "Achilles heel," I did not mean to imply that the products of the system would overnight become subversive revolutionaries who would topple the present collective dictatorship. Rather I was pointing to the virtual certainty that the impact of education in an evolutionary sense would be constructive from our point of view. In the near term it might create an insuppressible public opinion that would prevent irrational and irresponsible actions by the leaders. Over the longer period, as the products of the system continue to replace the old revolutionary Bolsheviks in the top echelons of the government, that government might become little by little more amenable to reasonable argument and more benevolent toward its own people and even toward those whose governments it now dominates.

So far as the quantitative accomplishments of Soviet education and its directed character are concerned, I think you may overstate the purity of the selection system a little; I was struck recently by the testimony of a keen observer who was recently in Moscow that much favoritism and nepotism exists in the selection of students for Moscow University, which is of course the great careerist university and, he thinks, academically inferior to Leningrad for that reason.

Moreover, I would not convey quite so strong a picture as you do on the score of quality; level for level, they have men equal to our best, but the generality of Soviet training does incline to produce a narrower specialist than our good schools. From the standpoint of end usefulness, the system of direction may make up for this in large part, but there is still the educational difference.

As to U. S. action, I should defer to those with more academic competence than I. It seemed to me, however, that Lewis Strauss' suggestions to the Edison Institute were sound.

Sincerely,

Allen W. Dulles
Director

ODDI:

Rewritten DCI:AWD:jb

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

Honorable William Benton
Encyclopedia Britannica
342 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Bill:

I have read with much interest your forthcoming Brittanica article and the speeches you have delivered. ~~You have done an admirable job of reporting, and to my mind have rendered a signal service to the nation in so clearly analyzing one of the fundamental strengths of our Soviet adversaries.~~

As to the issue between us, I do not think it is as sharp as you would imply.

We are in almost complete agreement as to the magnitude and general qualitative excellence of the Soviet educational program. And I am just as concerned as you are at the difficult challenge it poses to our society at home and abroad. Taking the really long term view, however, I remain convinced that there is reason for ~~fundamental~~ optimism.

Cautious
My optimism is simply based on the profound belief expressed by St. John: "The truth shall make you free." (John VIII, 32). My reasoning is equally simple: a system of education cannot be as good in the fields of science as the Soviet's is and ~~be~~ totally fallacious in the areas of knowledge involving basic human values including history and economics. Students and teachers alike will press for genuine enlightenment across the board and will reject falsified history and contrived absurdities in the social sciences. Dramatic evidence to support this came only last week at the 20th Party Congress when speaker after speaker called for accurate realistic revision of the basic Soviet works on history and economics. To be sure, a lot of this was part of the attack on Stalin and centered on the Short History of the Communist Party, with its obvious distortions, but the implications were broader. Moreover, in economics there are a lot of matters that are susceptible to proof, one of them being the behavior of capitalist economies, which certainly continues to throw the Soviet theorists into confusion.

overnight *might*

When I referred to the Soviets massive educational drive as an "Achilles heel," I did not mean to imply that the products of the system would become subversive revolutionaries who would topple the present collective dictatorship. Rather I was pointing to the virtual certainty that the impact of education in an evolutionary sense would be constructive from our point of view. In the near term it would create an insuppressible public opinion that would prevent irrational and irresponsible actions by the leaders. Over the longer period, as the products of the system continue to replace the old revolutionary Bolsheviks in the top echelons of the government, that government would become little by little more amenable to reasonable argument and more benevolent toward its own people and even toward those whose governments it now dominates. *might*

~~In your second letter, you have asked whether you can say something on behalf of us both. You certainly can. So far as the quantitative accomplishments of Soviet education and its directed character are concerned, I think you may overstate the purity of the selection system a little; I was struck recently by the testimony of ~~Martin Malin~~ of ~~Harvard~~ that much favoritism and nepotism exists in the selection of students for Moscow University, which is of course the great careerist university and, he thinks, academically inferior to Leningrad for that reason.~~

Moreover, I would not convey quite so strong a picture as you do on the score of quality; level for level, they have men equal to our best, but the generality of Soviet training does incline to produce a narrower specialist than our good schools like MIT. From the standpoint of end usefulness, the system of direction may make up for this in large part, but there is still the educational difference.

As to

should refer to them

~~On the score of US action, I must of course ask to be excused. It is a most difficult question and one on which I should not be heard publicly, though I thought Lewis Strauss' suggestions to the Edison Institute were very sound.~~

Sincerely,

Allen W. Dulles
Director

with more academic competence than I, it seemed to me, however, that

a keen observer who was recently in Moscow

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MEMORANDUM FOR: MR. DULLES

Bob Amory had requested the extra copies of his article which Mr. Benton refers to in order that the Library would have some on hand in case there were inquiries.

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23 Feb 56
(DATE)

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